Christendom v. Clericus: The Punishment of Clerical Necromancers During the Period 1100-1500 CE

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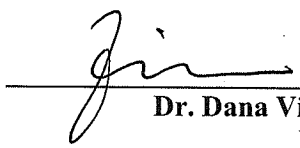

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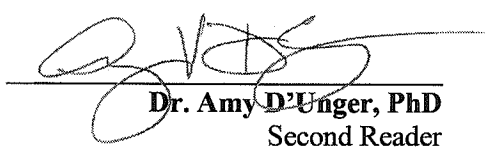

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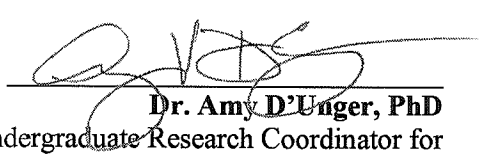

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Abstract

"The power of Christ compels you!" is probably the most infamous line from the 1973 film *The Exorcist*. The movie, as the title suggests, follows the journey of a priest as he attempts to excise a demon from within the body of a young girl. These types of sensational pop culture depictions are what inform the majority of people's conceptions of demons and demonic magic nowadays. Historically, however, human conceptions of demons and magic were more nuanced than those depicted in *The Exorcist* and similar works. Demons were not only beings to be feared but sources of power to be exploited. Necromancy, a form of demonic magic, was one avenue in which individuals could attempt to gain control over a demon. During the period this thesis explores, 1100-1500 CE, only highly educated men, like clerics, could complete the complicated rituals associated with necromancy. Thus, this study examines the rise of the learned art of clerical necromancy in conjunction with the re-emergence of higher learning in western Europe that developed during the period from 1100-1500 CE. By examining stories of allegations of necromancy against popes and regular clergy, this thesis attempts to add to the body of existing literature on demonic magic by expanding our understanding of how clerical necromancers were punished for their foray into demonic magic (as necromancy and other forms of magic were deemed "heretical," or banned, in the eyes of the Catholic Church). The findings suggest that allegations of clerical necromancy were often part of a "common toolbox of accusations" lodged against an opponent, often personally or politically motivated, and did not stem from true concerns over clerics attempting magic. Moreover, if one was accused of necromancy, the punishment one received was often positively correlated to the amount of political power one possessed or had access to.

Introduction

As Christian theology became codified during the early Middle Ages (500-1000 CE), the cultural understanding of magic was subsequently transformed. In the Greco-Roman world, magic was generally considered to be a morally neutral act.[1] However, as Christianity expanded and took root in the majority of western Europe, magic became conflated with acts of the devil or his agents in sin, demons, and unequivocally condemned. The term "demon" is derived from the classical term *daimones*, which referred to supernatural beings the ancients would invoke when attempting magic.[2] Generally, they were ambivalent spirits but could, quite rarely, be hostile to humanity.[3] Though Christian demons were derived from classical *daimones*, they were, through their direct association with Satan, considered to be completely and irrevocably malevolent. Thus, as the Middle Ages progressed, the Catholic Church moved to condemn any magic (among other practices and beliefs considered heretical) that might have involved - implicitly or explicitly - invoking or working with demons.[4]

This study focuses on understanding the canonical and secular legal repercussions for pursuing one particular form of demonic magic: necromancy. Necromancy specifically involved invoking demons via ritual magic in order to control and exploit them for a particular purpose, such as creating love potions or harming an enemy.[5] Clerical necromancy, or demonic sorcery practiced by members within the Catholic Church's ecclesiastical ranks, was seen as a true perversion of a cleric's position and a flourishing of the Church's worst. Though practiced

[1] Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 963. doi:10.2307/2903617.
[2] Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 963. doi:10.2307/2903617.
[3] Ibid., 963.
[4] Ibid., 963.
[5] Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

throughout the Middle Ages, clerical necromancy became more of a concern for the Catholic Church with the increase in the number of texts, especially in Arabic, reintroduced into the western world during the 11th and 12th centuries, and with the concurrent increase in the number of learned men throughout western Europe. It is important to note that Arabic knowledge and learning was viewed with suspicion in western Europe. This was mostly due to Europeans' own prejudices against the Islamic world as opposed to the inherent inferiority of Arabic texts.

Prior to the rise of universities, a monastic vocation was the primary path to gaining an education; this form of education was rooted in "biblical exegesis," which is the study or interpretation of religious texts – Christian or not –in order to derive a spiritual/moral meaning from them.[6] This form of learning lacked any sort of critical engagement with the texts being studied and generally did not involve engaging with controversial topics, like magic. On the other hand, universities, emerging around the 11th and 12th centuries, were centered around the critical examination of texts and promoted the questioning of established moral, theological, and philosophical authorities.[7] The period beginning in the 11th century and extending through the 15th can be characterized, for the sake of this paper, as a period marked by the emergence and progressive consolidation of higher learning at an institutional level.

Most of the literature in the field of medieval magic that focuses on clerical necromancy specifically deals understanding its fundamentals. This means that most studies attempt to understand *how* the clergy conceptualized and rationalized practicing necromancy, *to what ends* it was utilized, the exact *methods* by which demons were summoned, etc. This research project attempts to answer questions on how clerical practitioners of necromancy were punished, if at

[6] Alison Shimko, "Scholasticism and Higher Education," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 29, 2019).
[7] Alison Shimko, "Scholasticism and Higher Education," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 29, 2019).

all, and by whom. The project addresses these questions by examining different cases of clerics accused of practicing necromancy, focusing specifically on the canonical punishment of the accused.

In order to achieve its stated purpose, this study will analyze accounts of accusations of and trials for clerical necromancy from the period 1100-1500 CE and situate these accounts against the background of canon law. In the context of recent scholarship, this study will build off of Richard Kieckhefer's foundational text, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, to expand his discussion of the legal and religious condemnation of sorcerers.[8] Through an examination of such sources and a comparative analysis of a variety of cases studies of clerical necromancers, this study will argue that during the period from approximately 1100-1500 CE, the political connection and power of an accused cleric affected how they were or were not prosecuted – either by the Church or secular authorities – for their foray into demonic magic.

This thesis further argues that the lack of strict regulation of diversity in clerical life thusly gave interested clerics – with the correct educational background – the "wiggle room" to pursue other interests, among which necromancy could have been included. The reality of medieval clerical life included a laxity in recruitment and the absence of uniformity in clerical training which allowed the ranks of the clergy to be filled with a variety of individuals with a variety of interests, thus creating an "umbrella" under which the term "clergy" varied greatly. This variety actually helps explain how clerics were able to pursue magic. It must have been difficult to oversee the instruction and regulate the lives of clerics throughout the entirety of western Christendom, particularly as the Church grew in power and size throughout the Middle Ages.

[8]Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Based on the available sources, clerical necromancy might not have been as widespread as previously suggested. Specifically, there is no evidence in the historical record of a "clerical underground," a term coined by Dr. Richard Kieckhefer, which scholars suggest existed. Allegations of necromancy more often than not – from the primary sources – boil down to *smear campaigns* and *rhetorical exercises* on the part of medieval men and chroniclers, as will be discussed in the Case Studies section of this thesis.

Literature Review

This research project aims to situate clerical necromancy within the period of 1100-1500 CE, in which higher learning re-emerged in western Europe and an influx of texts entered the region, to answer the question: how were clerical practitioners of necromancy punished, if at all, and by whom? By "inquisitorial fervor," this study is referring to the Church's growing obsession with eradicating heresy, under which necromancy was categorized, over the course of the Middle Ages. Any reference in canon or secular law to summoning demons or demonic magic can be extrapolated to be referring to necromancy (as that was precisely what necromancy was thought to be in a medieval context– summoning demons for their aid, a concept which will be discussed further in the historical background section of this thesis). Moreover, based on the historical record, it is clear that necromancy was considered heretical (even if it was condemned jointly with other forms of magic at the time), as exemplified by Gratian's *Decretum Gratiani* (from the mid-12th century), which was the first legal document to categorize magic under heresy, or Pope John XXII's 1326 papal bull, which condemned the practice of demonic magic because it was drawing many Christians into sin and *heresy*.[9] Thus, this study looks at the

[9] Pope John XXII, "The Decretal *Super illius specula,*" in *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700 A Documentary History,* ed. Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 82.

condemnation of heretics/heresy throughout the period 1200-1500 CE to examine the secular and canonical punishment of clerical necromancy.

Most of the literature that discusses clerical necromancy, as a subcategory of medieval magic, deals with understanding its fundamentals: how the clergy practiced necromancy, to what ends it was utilized, and the methods by which demons were summoned, etc. The first scholar to examine clerical necromancy was Richard Kieckhefer, one of the foundational scholars in the field of medieval magic. He discussed clerical necromancy specifically in his widely-sourced textbook *Magic in the Middle Ages* (1989)[10] and later published *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (1997), which is a direct translation of a necromancer's handbook from the Middle Ages. [11] Kieckhefer's main argument is that there existed a "clerical underworld" based on the logic that, due to the handwriting found in the margins of many necromantic handbooks, *someone* was reading the manuals, and since clerics were among the few with the educational ability read and comment on these handbooks, a "clerical underworld" emerged during this period. However, in his discussion regarding punishments for practitioners of sorcery/magic, he does not separate necromancy from other forms of magic and thus does not discuss (even in his chapter on the subject) specific legal punishments for clerical necromancers.

Kieckhefer's research has guided a plethora of researchers after him and is credited with producing a revival in interest in medieval magic. In fact, almost every secondary source this project has engaged substantially with has cited Kieckhefer's *Magic in the Middle Ages*,[12] including, most notably for the sake of this project, Michael D. Bailey's "From Sorcery to

[10] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[11] Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).
[12] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages."[13] Bailey argues that "witchcraft" emerged after authorities conflated two highly different forms of magical systems under one singular term. These two systems were necromancy (primarily practiced by clerics with the prerequisite ritual and Latin education/literacy to invoke demons) and popular magic performed by common people.[14] This work is vital as it points out that necromancy deserves study apart from the more general category of medieval magic.

As exemplified in Bailey's work, necromancy has existed as a single identifiable topic and thus distinct in the study of its punishment for nearly two decades. However, other secondary sources published after "From Sorcery to Witchcraft…" regarding magic in the Middle Ages study the persecution and punishment of sorcerers in general but do not examine how clerics specifically were punished. What can account for this supposed scholarly oversight? As Claire Fanger claimed in her article, "Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages," the study of medieval magic as an independent field – and not in conjunction with more "concrete" academic areas, such as science or medicine – is rather new. [15] Even in the 1970s and 1980s, when Richard Kieckhefer began to write about this topic, it was still examined as part of a wider study of the European witch trials and not as an autonomous entity. The late- twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (1990-2013) saw interest in this field expanding and moving from within the confines of "real" areas of focus to be examined independently (again, exemplified in Bailey's work). Recently, however, research in this field has halted, as the most current,

[13] Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001). doi:10.2307/2903617.
[14] Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 965. doi:10.2307/2903617.
[15] Claire Fanger, "Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages," *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 611. doi: 10.1111/hic3.12068.

published article this project was able to find regarding clerical necromancy was published in 2013. Thus, more work remains to be done in this subfield.

Of the literature on necromancy, there has been only one, entitled "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy" by Tamar Herzig (2011),[16] that specifically deals with the punishment of clerical necromancers. This article uses the "Carmelite Affair" in fifteenth-century Bologna, Italy as a case study to examine inquisitorial procedures in Italy during this period. It ends with an example of Dominican prosecutors punishing not the clerics for their crimes (which included, among other things, preaching in support of demonic magic) but the clerics' student – an important point for the purpose of this study, as many clerics remained unpunished for their crimes, and the blame was supplanted from the teacher to the student. (The fact that the clerics remained unpunished, often as an result of their political power, is expanded upon more in the Case Studies section of this thesis.) This article is what inspired this project, the goal of which is to find similar cases from different regions of Europe to use as comparative case studies to address the primary research question. In doing so, this study aims to draw general conclusions regarding secular and canonical legal repercussions for those within the Church's ranks as well as explore the validity of allegations of clerical necromancy.

Historical Background

In the introduction to his text *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Richard Kieckhefer describes magic as "a crossroads where different pathways of medieval culture converge."[17] With that spirit in mind, this thesis is concerned with examining the "crossroad" or intersection of Christianity, medieval law, and magic in order to get a better understanding of the legal

[16] Tamar Herzig, "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011): doi: 10.1086/664084.
[17] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

repercussions – both in frequency and severity of punishment – for practicing the learned art of necromancy. But in order to get to our primary discussion, we must first examine what the concept of "magic" meant in a wider medieval context.

Magic in the Middle Ages

To those living during the early medieval period (which dates from approximately 500 CE - 1000 CE), "magic" was something both tangibly and spiritually threatening. Until approximately the thirteenth century, there was no clear divide, among the popular masses, between demonic and "natural" magic.[18] This divide, as mentioned in the introduction, was in stark contrast to how those of Classical Antiquity (8th century BCE until approximately the 5th century CE) viewed magic.[19] Since much of the cultural and social foundations of the Middle Ages, particularly the Early Middle Ages, are rooted in Antiquity, it is imperative to further explore the meaning and uses of magic during the Classical Era.

Broadly, the people of Antiquity viewed magic with ambivalence, or in a contradictory manner; it could be *used* for good or for evil. It was the outcome of magic, not an inherent moral characteristic, that determined if it was good or bad.[20] Moreover, there was often no line drawn between religion and magic. Oftentimes, in order to practice some form of magic, one would invoke the names of gods or deities, the most powerful supernatural forces of the classical world. For instance, take the following example from Kieckhefer's *Magic in the Middle Ages*: "another gem shows a female figure, possibly the goddess Isis, with a spiral of meaningless letters around her. On the reverse is an inscription asking that one Achillas be brought back to a certain

[18] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.
[19] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9.
[20] Id., 11.

Dionysias. In other words, a woman names Dionysias was using the gem for love magic, in hopes that it might bring Achillas to her."[21]

But magic was not contained only to the realm of the commons (nor was it used only for love charms), it was explored, practiced, and ridiculed by some of the most significant historical figures of Antiquity.[22] In Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, many of the everyday medicinal remedies and actions he prescribes and discusses, such as putting the tongue of a live frog over the heart of a sleeping woman to compel her to answer all questions truthfully, seem to rely, at least in part, on natural magic.[23] However, he strongly derides the work of the magi, Zoroastrian priests of Persia from whom the term "magic" is derived, as well as "traditional" forms of magic to say, "there is no one who is not afraid of spells and incantations."[24] This quotation is telling for a number of reasons. The first being that Pliny, though he seems mostly unaware of the irony, is advocating, at least implicitly, for the use of natural magic while simultaneously condemning "magic" in general. He is thusly playing into the mixed classical attitudes towards magic - some was good (his remedies) and others (the spells and incantations of the magi) were bad and ought to be feared. This intellectual separation of magic into two general sects would not exist again until the Late Middle Ages.[25]

To summarize, the Antiquity was a "magical place." From invoking the power of gods and goddess to making curse tablets, magic was widespread and pervasive, touching the minds and work of even men like Aristotle. Importantly, magic was not separate from religion. However, all this would change with the development and spread of Christianity.

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[21] Id., 23.
[22] Id., 19.
[23] *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[24] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19.
[25] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 25.

Christianity ushered in a sharp divide between religion and magic. Early Christian writers and theologians (from the around the 4th - 6th centuries) saw magic as a pagan practice (i.e. invoking anyone/thing that was not the one true god, such as pagan deities, was classified as being demonic in some way and therefore evil) or only the purview of heretical Christians, which thusly created a delineation between "proper" religious adherence and magic.[26] Christianity viewed all magic, no matter the intention or outcome, as decidedly evil, despite the ironic fact that the Bible is rife with examples of what could be defined as "magic." For example, Jesus Christ raising Lazarus from the grave could be interpreted as necromancy. In addition, there is an image in the Roman catacombs from the 3rd/4th centuries CE that depicts Jesus Christ as a magician multiplying loaves of bread; a wand, a universal symbol of the magician, is in Christ's hand. This suggests that there was a bit more fluidity/intermingling of religion and magic before Christianity solidified the boundaries it drew between correct and heretical practice after it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 CE.[27]

This highly-Christianized view of magic persisted among the common and intellectual classes until around 1200-1500 CE when magic was again beginning to split into two camps: natural magic and demonic magic. Natural magic concerned itself with studying "occult virtues" or the "hidden powers of nature."[28] This included things like medicinal magic, astrology, and alchemy. Demonic magic concerned itself with summoning demons for their help in human affairs; the goal was to control the demons and force them to do a sorcerer's bidding.[29] Generally, these two distinctions were identified and accepted by theologians and philosophers, the intellectual class, who had the educational background to distinguish between popular and

[26] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26.
[27] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.
[28] Id., 140.
[29] Id., 166.

learned magic.[30] That being said, oftentimes the line between natural and demonic magic was blurred and difficult to define in practice. For example, the *Ars Notoria,* a necromantic handbook from around the twelfth century, included information on how to summon angels for divinatory purposes. This obviously not the same heretical crime as summoning demons, but using the *Ars Notoria* was overall condemned due to the difficulty in determining if one was really summoning an angel or not (i.e. one could claim to be using the text to get in contact with angels when really one was conversing with demons). For the sake of this paper, we will not be concerning ourselves with popular magic, though it is important to note that magic during the High and Late Middle Ages continued to be practiced by a variety of individuals of all social ranks (from monks, parish priests, physicians, and midwives to diviners, astrologers, and folk healers).[31] Learned magic was simply more specialized due to the educational requirements, which will be further explored in the next section when we discuss the learned magic this thesis is concerned with analyzing: necromancy.

What was Medieval Necromancy?

In a modern context, "necromancy" typically refers to the practice of raising individuals from the dead. In a medieval context, necromancy was far more nuanced and encompassed a variety of practices, rituals, and spells in order to gain power and control over demons.[32] It is important to note here that although necromancers dealt with demons and can be associated with the devil, necromancy was *not* a form of witchcraft. The key difference between the two is that clerical necromancers were attempting to gain control over demons and other astral spirits in order to *compel them* to do their bidding; witches would *submit themselves* to the control of

[30] Id., 16
[31] Id., 53.
[32] Sebastià Giralt, "Medieval necromancy, the art of controlling demons: Origins, practitioners, languages and techniques of magic via the spirits," Sciencia.cat. University of Barcelona, translated April 10, 2017.

demons for power, aid, etc.[33] (This distinction is especially important to keep in mind when we begin our discussion of the persecution of magic and inquisitorial procedures; the trials and punishments of clerical necromancers were nowhere near the scale of the witch trials and executions of the Early Modern Period.) Moreover, witchcraft was viewed as an "inversion of religion," with the Christian God being replaced by Satan, which is probably why it was met with such vehement opposition and persecution.[34] On the other hand, necromancy relied upon Christian traditions, rites, and rituals to invoke demons, but did not involve the explicit worship of the devil or demons - it was thusly not an "inversion" of religion but simply a perversion. That being said, as discussed earlier, necromancy was considered heretical due to its association with Satan and his demons.

The connection between Christianity and necromancy goes deeper than simply borrowing a few Christian phrases or prayers to invoke a demon; the structure of a demonic summoning was essentially that of an anti-exorcism.[35] Instead of expelling a demon, one conjured it for the purpose of controlling it. Generally, there were three main uses for necromancy: to affect other people's minds and wills, to create illusions (it is here the lore regarding "raising people from the dead" emerged – necromancers would call upon demons who could temporarily inhabit the body of a deceased individual), or for divinatory purposes (i.e. to see the past, present, or future).[36] What would a cleric, a "man of God," need or want that would compel him to turn to necromancy? To answer that question, we first need to take a look at who exactly medieval clerics were.

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[33] Sebastià Giralt, "Medieval necromancy, the art of controlling demons: Origins, practitioners, languages and techniques of magic via the spirits," Sciencia.cat.
[34] Sebastià Giralt, "Medieval necromancy, the art of controlling demons: Origins, practitioners, languages and techniques of magic via the spirits," Sciencia.cat.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 151.

Clerics as Sorcerers

According to Richard Kieckhefer, the term "cleric" during the Middle Ages could refer to "even a boy still in adolescence, who had been tonsured as a mark of pious intent to be ordained. More narrowly, it meant a person who had been ordained at least to lower orders."[37] In addition, students in medieval universities would be ordained to lower orders "as a matter of course" and were for all intents and purposes, legally clergymen.[38] This apparent lack of strict regulation as to precisely whom and how many individuals were ordained into the ranks of the clergy was compounded by the fact that these men would not go to seminaries for religious training – they were "practically unknown of at the time."[39] That being said, clerics were still expected to have at least a rudimentary understanding of Latin as well as Catholic ritual and doctrine, but examinations of such skills were not uniformly strict nor enforced across Europe, and thus many clerics were surprisingly illiterate and uneducated.[40] This study will not be able to comment on the magical pursuits of such clerics, as the information on them is lacking (generally, scandalous accusations of powerful men like popes left written records as opposed to accusations against lay clergy) and the majority of them most likely were not able to pursue necromancy (or other forms of learned magic) as diligently or as regularly compared to their well-educated counterparts, as discussed below. However, the notion that *all* lower clergymen did not pursue necromancy is a bit misleading. The idea of gaining control over spirits was incredibly popular during this period, so some might have attempted to dabble in this form of magic, but to what extent or how successfully they were able to do so is not in the current historical record.

[37] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 153.
[38] Ibid., 153.
[39] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 154.
[40] Ibid., 154.

The clerics that did practice necromancy would have needed to have a *strong* command of Latin and rituals – not a rudimentary skillset. In the absence of seminaries, where did these men get such knowledge and training during the later Middle Ages? Universities. Universities first emerged in Europe during the 12th century, and by the 14th century they had expanded across the continent, training individuals in the liberal arts as well as medicine, law, and theology.[41] Importantly, magic was not an explicit course of study at universities.[42] What was most important in regard to magic is that universities produced men who had the knowledge and skillset to self-study learned forms of magic (by getting their hands on grimoires or magical textbooks). Furthermore, universities "fostered a commitment to intellectual inquiry which led many scholars beyond an interest in traditional texts."[43] This, of course, led to experimenting with magical texts as well as, interestingly, Jewish and Islamic scholarship (which Europe absorbed predominately from Spain, which was under Islamic rule during the Middle Ages) so much so that portions of the Islamic practices of astronomy and astrology were incorporated into necromantic rituals.[44] In addition, this access to a wider variety of sources led some to partake in rhetorical exercises as described in the introduction, which only increased misconceptions regarding magic and heresy during the later medieval period.

However, it wasn't just individuals affiliated with universities who dabbled in magic and necromancy. Monks and friars are also recorded to have pursued necromancy. We know this due to the sheer volume of occult texts found in monastic libraries. For instance, St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury kept a library full of magical texts – around 30 in total – collected over the

[41] Alison Shimko, "Scholasticism and Higher Education," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 29, 2019).
[42] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 117.
[43] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 117.
[44] Ibid., 117.

course of the 13th through 15th centuries. [45] In particular, "in the first half of the fourteenth century, a relative absence of external scrutiny and internal discipline at St. Augustine's aided the study of the occult texts that had been condemned by the monks' contemporaries."[46] It has been suggested by scholars that the abbey kept the texts in order to "use natural magic to develop preaching aids extolling the wonder of God's creation, to employ ritual magic to communicate with angels or even increase the likelihood of salvation, and so on."[47] And while the monks at St. Augustine's Abbey used their magical aids for "natural" or what they deemed "virtuous purposes," they were still responsible for the care and study of condemned occult works.[48] Drawing the line between natural and demonic magic, as mentioned, is incredibly difficult. So, the notion that all of the monks who inhabited the abbey over the course of the Middle Ages did not actively pursue magic seems unlikely. That being said, however, there is no remaining evidence to suggest that the monks at St. Augustine's pursued necromancy in particular:

> Necromantic texts, that is, experiments, texts, or manuals that involved conjuring demons to do the operator's will, were deliberately avoided by the monks of St. Augustine's, and they do not appear in the library catalogue or surviving manuscripts. This is not as predictable an omission as it might appear: *preparation for demonic attack was considered part of the monastic vocation, and many medieval sources describe monks who had special skills for dealing with demons. Motivations for necromantic practice included curiosity about the nature of demons and a desire for contact with the numinous; its practitioners could therefore still view it as a religious activity*.[49]

As Page rightly argues in this quotation, the fact that the monks at St. Augustine's Abbey, at face value, are not known with certainty to have pursued necromancy is out of the norm; the

[45] Sophie Page, "Monks and their Magic Texts" in *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press: 2013), 1.
[46] Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013), 7.
[47] Id., 10.
[48] Id., 25.
[49] Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013), 21.

monastic pursuit of demonic magic was commonplace, as exemplified not only by the frequency of occult books in monastic libraries but by the popularity and prevalence of one particular necromantic handbook: the *Ars Notoria*. The *Ars Notoria*, most likely published at the end of the twelfth/early thirteenth century, is the last chapter in the *Lesser Key of Solomon*, a grimoire on demonology, and the relatively large numbers of surviving manuscripts of this text—despite its severe condemnation by the Church— suggests that it was "either well embedded in late medieval magical practice or that the authorities were ambivalent about its repression."[50] St. Augustine's Abbey had two copies of this text.[51] And while the *Ars Notoria* is predominately focused on communicating with and summoning *angels* for assistance, the rituals prescribed within its pages toe the line between "natural" and demonic magic.

The Catholic Church in the Middle Ages

In the year 1000 CE, the Catholic Church's leading authority, the papacy, was an incredibly weak institution that was subjugated to secular control and held very little power outside of Italy. Over the course of the Middle Ages, however, this would change. Throughout the following centuries, the Church engaged in variety of power struggles with political and state authorities (including kings, emperors, and aristocrats), each time coming out on top and subsequently gaining more power and control over western Europe.[52]

Before the power of the papacy expanded, the Catholic Church had a variety of grievances with state authorities for a multitude of reasons, a few of which include issues of lay investiture (the ability of state officials to appoint Church authorities), clerical allegiance to local authorities over allegiance to the papacy, simony (the buying and selling of Church offices), and

[50] Sophie Page, "The *Ars Notoria* and its Monastic Audience" in *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013), 68.
[51] Id., 125.
[52] Alison Shimko, "Popes and Papacy from 1000-1300, the Church, and the State in Conflict," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 28, 2019).

the immorality and ignorance of many clerics (elaborated on in the previous section).[53] The Church began to seriously act on these grievances in the late 11th century with Pope Gregory VII outlawing lay investiture in 1075 and ushering in an intensive reform program historians refer to as "The Gregorian Reforms."[54] Of course, these proscriptions did not go unnoticed by state authorities; Gregory was challenged by the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, specifically over the lay investiture provision. This resulted in an excommunication of the Holy Roman Emperor. Quickly thereafter, nobles throughout the Holy Roman Empire "defected" and shifted their support from Henry to the Pope. No one was willing to support a man who claimed to have the holy authority to rule who was no longer in the favor of the Church. The situation only came to an end only after Henry IV spent three days supplicating himself before Gregory and begging for forgiveness. And although this confrontation would later result in the pope being dethroned by thugs sent by Henry, it is nonetheless an example of the Church's growing power.[55]

Such explosive interactions between the Church and western European political leaders would continue throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. Another famous example is that of Thomas Beckett, the archbishop of England during the 12th century. Thomas Beckett had been close friends with Henry II, the king of England from 1154-1189 CE, throughout their childhoods.[56] But the two men came to blows over the Constitution of Clarendon in 1164. The document allowed the reinstatement of traditional judicial practices in regard to clerical crimes – i.e., clerics would be tried in secular courts and no longer in ecclesiastical courts, which were historically more lenient (for example, a charge of murder in secular courts could lead to a

[53] Alison Shimko, "Popes and Papacy from 1000-1300, the Church, and the State in Conflict," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 28, 2019).
[54] Alison Shimko, "Popes and Papacy from 1000-1300, the Church, and the State in Conflict," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, May 28, 2019).
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

sentence of mutilation or even death, but in ecclesiastical courts the worst that could happen was "defrocking" or excommunication). Beckett wholeheartedly did not support the Constitution of Clarendon (as it was an infringement on Church authority by the state) and in a moment of rage over the supposed betrayal of his friend, Henry is credited with saying something along the lines of: "Will no one rid me of this petulant priest?" The nobles in his court took this less as a frustrated declaration and more as an instruction. Thomas Beckett was murdered by English nobles in 1170, in a scandal that has come to be known as "The Murder in the Cathedral." Henry was held responsible for the actions of his courtiers and flogged by the monks of the monastery of Canterbury; he would eventually nullify the Constitution of Clarendon.[57]

There are plenty of examples throughout the Middle Ages of the conflict between Church and state; this recurring theme of the Church and state coming head to head – and the Church coming out on top – was a staple of political reality throughout the High Middle Ages. All the power that the Catholic Church was accumulating over state authorities gave it the ability to not only dictate matters of state but also create and enforce laws, particularly those involving the investigation and punishment of heresy, a Church role that would come to fruition during the Fourth Lateran Council.

[57] Ibid.

Canon Law and Magic

A major medieval work on Church canon law is *The Decretals* by Gratian, which is essentially an encyclopedia of approximately 4,000 texts on canon law compiled during the mid-twelfth century. In the *Decretals*, Cases 26 and 33 discuss magic specifically. Case 26 deals with a priest found guilty of lot casting and divination. Obviously, these charges do not fall within the bounds of what we have defined as necromancy, but the *Decretals* goes on to condemn "anyone in holy orders who consults magicians of any sort" and asserts that "magicians are called *malefici* (evil-doers) by many people because of the crimes they commit…[and] their power is actually provided by demons."[58] In summary, the Decretals view all forms of magic as related, in some way, to demonic power, and thus believes them to be heretical and deserving of the punishment of excommunication (notably, not execution). Their interpretations are incredibly important, as the *Decretals* became a foundational, standard legal text studied in medieval universities. Thus, the views of this text were inculcated in an entire generation of legal professionals. Remember, the Catholic Church had a strong hold over universities (every university student was made a clergyman), so the line between religion and education was incredibly thin.

The Fourth Lateran Council convened in 1215 during the height of a struggle against heretics in southern France known as the Albigensian Crusade. (This context would heavily inform the majority of Pope Innocent III's proposals at this meeting, as his goal was to take control of heretical movements with a "crusading mentality" and bring order back to the Church)[59] The goal of the council was to codify Church dogma, doctrine, and practices, all of

[58] Gratian, "Decretum (Decretals)," in *Magic and Medieval Society*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas (New York: Routledge, 2014), 101. Google Books.
[59] Alison Shimko, "The Church and Persecution in the High Middle Ages," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, June 4, 2019).

which would reaffirm and increase Church power by expanding Church control over its members.[60] At this council, among other pronouncements, it was decreed that no one would gain acceptance to heaven without the seven sacraments (which ensured that the Church was part of every facet of life from birth to death) and that Jewish and Muslim individuals would have to wear identifiable clothing in Catholic territory. In addition, the Franciscan and Dominican mendicant orders were created.[61] The Dominicans, in particular, would play a central role in the policing of magic and heresy across western Europe in the centuries to come. In addition, Dominican inquisitors were given increased freedom after Lateran IV to conduct investigations and issue condemnations/punishments to guilty heretics.

Medieval heresy, of which necromancy was categorized, referred to a wide variety of beliefs that could be condemned, contained, and controlled by the Catholic Church. One of the most important outcomes of the Fourth Lateran Council was the expansion of the policing of heresy. Canon 3 of the Fourth Lateran Council addressed heresy directly: "We hereby excommunicate and anathematize[62] every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known, for while they have different faces they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails, since in all of them vanity is a common element."[63] The emphasis on orthodoxy here is vital to understanding what was considered heretical; it gives heresy a general definition as anything the Church deemed out of line with its own beliefs. Magic and necromancy were

[60] Alison Shimko, "The Church and Persecution in the High Middle Ages," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, June 4, 2019).
[61] Ibid.
[62] Meaning "condemn."
[63] "Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215" Fordham University, last edited January 2, 2020. https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp.

thusly considered heretical because they were unorthodox practices and therefore not in line with Church teachings.

If anyone was convicted of heresy – lay person or clergy – Canon 3 goes on to describe their due punishment: "Those condemned, being handed over to the secular rulers of their bailiffs, let them be abandoned, to be punished with due justice, clerics being first degraded from their orders."[64] This is also called "relaxing to the secular arm," and goes to show not only how integrated secular and religious condemnation of magic and heresy was, but also the importance of state political authorities in policing heresy (an important note to make for when we get to the case studies). One way of secular containment, and the focus of this thesis, was via legal means, primarily through the implementation of inquisitorial procedures across western Europe. Referring to these legal procedures as "inquisitorial" is not meant to allude to an association with The Spanish Inquisition of the Early Modern Period; there existed no equal, singular "medieval inquisition" on par with that of the infamous Spanish Inquisition. Rather, "inquisition" in this context refers to the type of legal process in which trials were conducted. These procedures are "inquisitorial," or its Latin origin "inquisito," in the sense that they are official inquiries into a person. Tribunals of inquisitors would gather personal information on an individual charged with heresy and judges would make determinations of innocence or guilt based on this accumulated research; there were no juries or trials by ordeal in this process. If someone was found guilty, there were a few recourses: penance (such as prayer, pilgrimage to a religious site, etc.) was the least horrible of the choices, followed by public shaming, life-long imprisonment (which would also involve the loss of property and require the individual to pay for their own confinement), and lastly execution. Execution was not a routine punishment; it was reserved for the most

[64] "Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215" Fordham University, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp.

extreme offenders, those who relapsed back into heresy after recanting their heretical beliefs or those who would refuse to confess and convert to Catholicism.[65]

In 1326, canon condemnation of heresy went a step further with Pope John XXII's papal bull, *Super illius specula* (Upon His Watchtower), which stipulated excommunication for anyone who summoned demons for the purpose of receiving any kind of help from them.[66] Although such an act did not necessarily entail devil worship, the bull specified that *all forms of conjuring demons in order to receive answers from them were considered practices that ''clearly savor of manifest heresy*."[67] Recall from the discussion of monastic intellectual pursuits earlier in this thesis that summoning demons was not always done with an evil, ulterior motive nor was its purpose inherently anti-religious (or for the purpose of "devil worship." This is an over-simplification of the purpose of necromancy). This hardline approach to magic and heresy was fueled by Pope John's own tangible fears of attacks by way of magic. Pope John thoroughly "feared magical assaults and assassination attempts on his own person" and thusly increased the persecution of sorcerers via his 1326 papal bull. [68] Despite its subjective origin, this papal bull would remain an important legal precedent for the remainder of the Middle Ages regarding the condemnation of sorcery and necromancy.

Case Studies

Prologue: Magic and Rhetoric

[65] Alison Shimko, "The Church and Persecution in the High Middle Ages," HTS 3030: Medieval Europe (class lecture, class lecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, June 4, 2019).
[66] Michael D. Bailey, "Pope John XXII," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (History Publications: Iowa University Press, 2006), 597-598. https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=history_pubs.
[67] Tamar Herzig, "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1035. doi: 10.1086/664084.
[68] Michael D. Bailey, "Pope John XXII," In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (History Publications: Iowa University Press, 2006), 597-598.

Parallel to the development of legal doctrine renouncing heresy and magic, these topics entered the literary realm with works like Anselm of Besante's *Rhetorimachia*, amplifying the attention brought to magic and necromancy in Europe. Thus, a brief discussion of Anselm's work is warranted, as it is one of the earliest literary pieces that extensively discusses necromancy and provides a template for how people spoke of and characterized necromancers in the following centuries.

First and foremost, it is important to situate Anselm's work within the wider tradition of rhetoric in western Europe. According to Beth S. Bennett, the origins of the *Rhetorimachia* are rooted in the Roman literary tradition of satire; in fact, according to Bennett, it can be grouped in with other works of Menippean satire (a mocking satirical genre).[69] And in the context in which it was written (during the Carolingian Renaissance of the 11th-12th centuries, in which there was a revival in interest in Classical works), it was understood as such.[70]

According to Anselm himself, from the introduction to this piece, he intended for the *Rhetorimachia* to be a "*controversia*," a game of ritual insult and attack – primarily against his cousin Rotiland, with whom he was engaged in a fiery debate over who was the better rhetorician.[71] This exchange included sharing insults and slanderous (mostly fictitious) stories about one another. For instance, among other things (like petty theft and failed sexual encounters), he accused Rotiland of using black magic to enter a house through a door and kill a

[69] Beth S Bennett, "The Rhetoric of Martianus Capella and Anselm De Besate in the Tradition of Menippean Satire," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 24, no. 2 (1991): 128-42.
[70] Irven M Resnick, "Anselm of Besate and Humanism in the Eleventh Century." *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 6 (1996): 1-11.
[71] Monika Otter, "Scurrilitas: Sex, Magic, and the Performance of Fictionality in Anselm of Besate's *Rhetorimachia*," in *Aspects of the Performance in Medieval Culture*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Germany: Hubert and Co., 2010), 111.

baby (using the hand of a dead man) while the mother slept.[72] Moreover, according to Anselm, the work deals not with *vera* but with *verisimilitude*; meaning, it deals not with the truth (*vera*) but *with what looks like* the truth (verisimilitude). So, very clearly and from the beginning, Anselm makes it clear that the *Rhetorimachia* is anything but undisputed fact, and contemporaries would have recognized it as such.

What is particularly fascinating about this work is that, according to historian Edward Peters, it influenced later chroniclers and moralists, who forgot or ignored the fictitious character of the piece and focused only on the enormities of the accusations being wielded against Rotiland and, in return, Anselm.[73] What makes this selective understanding interesting is that it calls into question the way other stories or accusations of necromancy were interpreted by later chroniclers. The information this study was able to find that discussed the necromantic nature of an offense often relied on secondary or later chroniclers writing down the stories/tales, particularly of the lesser clergymen. In addition, many of these later accounts took on a similar format to that of the *Rhetorimachia*. Specifically, accusations of necromancy were often accompanied by accusations of sexual promiscuity and other crimes, thus characterizing necromancers as overall immoral individuals. This phenomenon can be seen throughout the following case studies, and thus the *Rhetorimachia* could be viewed as an early "template" for necromantic accusations.

Moreover, Anselm was a clergyman himself, and the fact that he was able to so easily accuse his cousin of necromancy (which is, as we have discussed, a particularly severe heretical

[72] Monika Otter, "Scurrilitas: Sex, Magic, and the Performance of Fictionality in Anselm of Besate's *Rhetorimachia*," in *Aspects of the Performance in Medieval Culture*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Germany: Hubert and Co., 2010), 109.
[73] Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 23. Google Books.

offense – even in a fictitious account) prompts the question of what was stopping other clergymen from doing the same? Were such allegations just common insults? How is one supposed to determine if an accusation is real or false? The delineation between real and fabricated accusations of necromancy is even more difficult to define when one takes into account the fact that, according to R.I. Moore, "the emergence of heresy…as a major anxiety of leading Churchmen…had much less to do with the heresy itself than with the need of an emergent clerical intelligentsia to define itself, establish its collective identity, and in asserting its exclusive right to distinguish between licit and illicit religious activity, to enforce with a new degree of clarity its claim to the cultural leadership of Latin Christendom."[74] Thus it can be extrapolated that accusations of necromantic heresy were not necessarily about uncovering and correcting unorthodox beliefs but were more about asserting the power and control of the clergy, often by using a template of accusations developed in the 12th century (as exemplified in the *Rhetorimachia*). This is an important point to consider as we move into the Case Studies section of this thesis.

The Cases

What did the persecution of clerical necromancers look like in practice? Other studies regarding medieval magic focus on looking at one individual example of clerical necromancy, rarely doing a comparative case study, in order to draw a generalized conclusion about how the Church handled magicians within its own ranks. This study takes a different approach and looks at multiple charges of necromancy against a variety of figures. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the accused were high-ranking in stature, as it is generally these types of scandalous cases that left written records. Therefore, it will be difficult to comment generally on

[74] R.I. Moore, "Heresy as Politics and the Politics of Heresy, 1022-1180," in *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, Joel Kaye, and E. Ann Matter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 45. Google Books.

how lower-ranking clerics were or were not punished for necromantic undertakings. From popes to scholars, this thesis looks at how the Church reacted to necromancy. Despite the harsh and unforgiving language of canon law, clerical necromancers seem to have rarely faced severe legal consequences for their actions. It appears this is primarily due to the political power of the accused. Moreover, incidences of allegedly true clerical necromancy seem to be few and far between, and accusations were more likely the byproduct of smear campaigns and rhetorical exercises on the part of enemies of the accused.

The idea of using allegations of sorcery/magic against an opponent was not a new concept developed in the Middle Ages. In fact, it had been deployed in Late Antiquity, when many misfortunes, particularly among the senatorial aristocracy, were blamed on the magical intervention of certain individuals. In "Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages," the historian Peter Brown argues that there were "purges based largely on *accusations* of sorcery in the reigns of Constantius II, Valentinian I, and Valens" (in the 4th century)[75] This phenomenon simply replayed throughout the Middle Ages for a variety of political purposes, albeit perhaps not on the scale of a full-on "purge." Thus, the available evidence suggests that actual necromancy was not as widespread of previously thought; cases were more along the lines of smear campaigns and rhetorical exercises (like that of Anselm of Besate's *Rhetorimachia*) as opposed to genuine concerns of magic being attempted on the part of the accused. The role of politics in the initiation and outcome of trials against alleged sorcerers is a common thread throughout the case studies in this thesis.

[75] Peter Brown, "Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages," in *Witchcraft, Confessions, and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas et al (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17-45. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Two popes faced charges of necromancy during what is now known as the Investiture Controversy of the eleventh century. This was a conflict between the Church and state (specifically the Holy Roman Empire) over lay investiture reform – a disagreement over who had the right to appoint clergy and bishops in the Holy Roman Empire, the emperor or the pope. Gregory VII, a virulent reformer and supporter of Church power over secular authorities, was pope at this time, and he was the subject of intense ridicule – including accusations of sorcery and necromancy – from supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. The charges can be traced back to a Cardinal Beno (Bruno) of either Santi Martino y Silvestro in Italy or Osnabruck in Germany (the sources are not clear on this). He was a supporter of the Antipope Clement III and sought to undermine the pope by taking the side of the secularists. In an attempt to discredit Gregory, "Beno portrayed the recent popes of Rome, starting with Sylvester II, as sorcerers who had corrupted the papacy with their unholy behavior. According to Beno, Hildebrand had been a student of Benedict IX and Lawrence of Amalfi, both of whom had studied under Gerbert at the school of sorcery he had established in Rome."[76]

Sylvester II, aka Gerbert of Aurillac, was pope from 999 –1003 CE, and had been surrounded by allegations of necromancy (as well as other charges, such as simony, murder, immorality and sacrilege) before and after his death. He was accused of "[learning] the impermissible arts of necromancy in Muslim Spain, and [summoning] the Devil in order to enter into a diabolical pact."[77] Specifically, chronicler William of Malmesbury accused Gerbert of "invoked the devil by using incantations…he promised perpetual homage if only the devil would protect him from the Saracen," from whom Gerbert had stolen a magic book regarding the

[76] Emma Knight, "What was the Investiture Controversy a controversy about?" Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2764/.
[77] Elly Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac 's Talking Head," *Journal of History of Ideas* 73, no. 2 (2012): 201-222.

"Saracen's whole art" (one in which Gerbert was forbidden to read).[78] Rumors of his necromantic pursuits went so far as to claim that he kept with him a "talking head" that he made via necromantic rituals.[79] Gerbert's story brings into focus the degree to which Arabic learning and education were seen in some circles as particularly dangerous to the Christian world. Thus, Cardinal Beno knew exactly what he was doing when comparing Gregory to Sylvester; he drew on the popular knowledge of these rumors to malign Gregory's reputation by associating him with an alleged necromancer, who had the additional fault of being learned in the dangerous Arabic arts, and accusing him of practicing necromancy himself. All of this was in service of a political agenda to get Cardinal Beno's ally – Clement III – into the papacy. In the end, this plan worked, as Gregory was pressured into abdicating the papal throne, which did in 1084. The accusations of necromancy were certainly not the only reason Gregory was ousted, but they played a role in casting doubt on Sylvester's successors and undermining their authority, paving the way for a new leader to take over.

Another pope, Boniface VIII, was accused of necromancy by associates of Philip IV, King of France, in the summer of 1303 (during a Franco-papal rift that had begun in 1301). It was the first time in European history that "such a welter of detailed [legal] evidence was produced by an attempt to defame or indict a supreme political leader."[80] Among broad accusations of heresy was the specific charge of "engaging in demonolatry and black magic" as

[78] "William of Malmesbury on Gerbert of Aurillac," in *Magic and Medieval Society*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas (New York: Routledge, 2014), 104. Google Books.
[79] Elly Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac 's Talking Head," *Journal of History of Ideas*, 202.
[80] Jeffrey Denton, "The Attempted Trial of Pope Boniface VIII for Heresy," in *Judicial Tribunals in England and Europe, 1200-1700: The Trial in History Volume 1*, ed. Maureen Mulholland and Brian Pullan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 117. ProQuest Ebook Library.

well as "causing the death of Celestine V."[81] Despite the weight and detail of the charges, Boniface VIII was never brought to trial; he died in October of 1303. His death did not stop the barrage of accusations against his memory, however. In fact, "over the period 1303 to 1311 the accusations against the pope developed and became more elaborate until the legal processes, first against the person of the pope and then against his memory, were abandoned *following a political agreement*."[82]

A fourth pope was also embroiled in papal intrigue – this time in the fifteenth century. The charges brought against Pope Benedict XIII in 1409, much like those brought against Gregory VII and Boniface VIII, were without merit and politically motivated.[83] At this time, the papacy was experiencing a true crisis of authority. The Western Schism had split the power among three separate popes ruling from three separate areas – Rome, Avignon, and Pisa. Benedict was pope in Avignon, and he, as well as Gregory XII, the pope in Rome, were both charged at the Council of Pisa in 1409 with a variety of crimes in order to depose them. Of the crimes, "witchcraft" was included.[84]

What is interesting about all of these cases of "sorcery" or "witchcraft" and "necromancy" being aimed at medieval popes is that none of the charges resulted in any true, legal repercussions (except in the case of Boniface VIII where legal documents were *produced*, but never used). Comparatively speaking, being removed from office is certainly not as bad as being "relaxed to the secular arm." Moreover, these charges were politically motivated, and there

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[81] Jeffrey Denton, "The Attempted Trial of Pope Boniface VIII for Heresy," in *Judicial Tribunals in England and Europe, 1200-1700: The Trial in History Volume 1*, ed. Maureen Mulholland and Brian Pullan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 125. ProQuest Ebook Library.
[82] Id., 128.
[83] M Harvey, "Papal witchcraft: The charges against Benedict XIII," *Studies in Church History* 10 (1973): 109-116. doi:10.1017/S0424208400006124.
[84] M Harvey, "Papal witchcraft: The charges against Benedict XIII," *Studies in Church History* 10 (1973): 109-116. doi:10.1017/S0424208400006124.

is very little historical evidence to suggest that any of these men actually dabbled in necromantic sorcery. This suggests that charges of necromancy during this period might have been brought not because people were actually trying to summon demons or practicing sorcery, but for political or venal interests.

When looking at charges of necromancy against lesser ranking individuals (meaning, individuals without the political, legal, and religious power of popes) one sees a different pattern emerge, such as in the story of John of Vallombrosa. John was a monk in Florence during the 14th century who developed a fascination with black magic and occult writings, which motivated him to dabble in sorcery. He was eventually found out (though through what means it is not clear) and summoned before the abbot-general of the Vallumbrosans. At first, John denied his studies, but eventually he confessed. He was thusly imprisoned, where he spent the rest of his life.[85] Here, the alleged sorcerer faced repercussions, but he was not excommunicated (as canon law prescribed) nor is there any evidence he was taken to trial at all; his crimes became a matter handled within the Franciscan Order itself. Moreover, John was able to find salvation, as "the solitude led him to true penitence, and some severe self-imposed austerities…seeing his conversion, his brothers asked that he return to the community, but he refused, preferring the saving solitude of his cell. He lived to old age as a hermit, writing, and receiving visions of Saint Catherine of Siena."[86] This story has important implications for the present study, as it highlights how heresy was handled *within* a religious Order (as opposed to being brought up in an ecclesiastical court), which suggests that these types of scenarios could have been used as "teachable moments." Meaning, instead of being punished as decreed in canon

[85] Blessed John of Vallombrosa," CatholicSaints.Info., last modified May 14, 2020, https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-john-of-vallombrosa/.
[86] Blessed John of Vallombrosa," CatholicSaints.Info., last modified May 14, 2020, https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-john-of-vallombrosa/.

law, John's story was used to deter other clergymen from going down the same path. (But if they did, they were not killed; instead, they were shown that there was the possibility of salvation.) Perhaps the Franciscans disagreed with what punishment canon law prescribed for sorcerers, or perhaps John had a particularly high standing within this group of Franciscans. No matter the reason, the fact that he was not turned over to ecclesiastical authorities is telling.

In another case of regular individuals – those without political power or a well-endowed political network – getting a more severe punishment for necromancy, in 1323 a Cistercian abbot was robbed and, in an attempt to find the robbers, he went to the former provost of the town of Château-Landon to seek aid. The two wound up making a deal with a sorcerer, who put a black cat in a box "with three days' provision of bread sopped in cream, oil that had been sanctified, and holy water, and the box was then buried in the ground at a cross road, two holes having been left in the box with two long pipes, which admitted sufficient air to keep the cat alive. After three days, the cat was to have been taken out and skinned, and the skin cut into things and these thongs made into a girdle, the man who wore it, with certain insignificant ceremonies, might call upon the evil one,[87] who would immediately come and answer any question he put to him."[88] However, before the three days were up, the box was discovered and the plan was foiled. Two men were burned for this crime, though *which* two men is not specified in the text.

These stories of the regular clergy who were accused and punished for practicing black magic/necromancy read more like folktales or stories along the lines of Anselm of Besate's rhetorical exercise, and seem to be more about scaring or providing clergymen with moral

[87] Understood in this context to be the devil, or a demon at the very least.
[88] Charles Roback, "The Mysteries of Astrology, and the Wonders of Magic: Including a History of the Rise and Progress of Astrology, and the Various Branches of Necromancy: Together with Valuable Directions and Suggestions Relative to the Casting of Nativities, and Predictions by Geomancy, Chiromancy, Physiognomy…" published by the author in 1854, digitized by New York Public Library Nov. 6, 2009, 219.

guidance as opposed to being true, well documented examples of clerical necromancy. Neither case involved an ecclesiastical or secular legal proceeding, nor was there any other source of evidence besides the two sources I could find that discussed these cases (unlike the popes, whose stories were more widely circulated and discussed during the Middle Ages). This begs the question: if one is to believe that these were real necromancers, then where is the evidence? Given the extreme nature of their crimes, and based on the legal logic of the Church and its crusade against heresy, these men should have been brought to ecclesiastical courts, tried, and punished, which would have left a paper trail. Again, no evidence – other than the sources that explained the stories – was found. Richard Kieckhefer mentions in his chapter on necromancy in *Magic in the Middle Ages* that many necromantic handbooks have writing in the margins, which suggests that *someone* was reading the manuals. These marginalia prompt him to suggest that a "clerical underworld" of men interested in necromancy existed. However, just because someone is reading or annotating a book does not mean that they were doing so in order to *practice* necromancy. Perhaps they were studying the texts in order to *catch* necromancers or from a innate human curiosity to understand the supernatural. Of course, without access to these manuscripts, this is all conjecture. Moreover, if there really was an entire underworld network of clerics practicing this form of magic – instead of just stories of a cleric here or there dabbling with the devil – would there not be more concrete evidence of this in the historical record?

This paper has mostly concerned itself with discussing medieval examples, as the years 1100 through approximately 1400 are generally considered a part of the Middle Ages. However, the final case study takes place at the end of the fifteenth century, therefore during the Renaissance. For the sake of this paper, the accepted divide between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is not important, as this thesis is focused on the period in which higher learning re-

emerged in Europe, which encompasses years in both periods. Thus, traditional historical periodization terms are of little use and would be too restrictive.

The story goes as follows: in June of 1473, Pope Sixtus IV instructed the vicar of the Bishop of Bologna to investigate rumors concerning several friars of the Carmelite order who were, allegedly, publicly preaching that summoning demons in order to obtain responses from them to specific questions was not heretical. But this was not the first time Bologna's Carmelite order was investigated for allegedly practicing heretical magic. In the 1460s, Antonio Cacciaguerra was put on two trials in which he was accused of owning necromantic books, playing a leading role in his group of necromancers, and of wanting to get demonic aid in finding buried treasure. At his first trial, he abjured and was not punished. However, he was condemned as a relapsed heretic in 1465 at which point he should have been handed over to secular authorities for capital punishment, but instead, after "abjuring" for a second time, he was sentenced to imprisonment in an Inquisition's prison in San Domenico; his sentence was later commuted to house arrest in his Carmelite friar in Bologna. There, he was able to muster up sympathy and support, drawing on enmity between Dominicans – who were in charge of his trials – and Carmelites, the order of which he was a member. According to Herzig, "Cacciaguerra contended that he had only confessed in his first trial to having entered into an express demonic pact because of his fear of torture. His abjuration had therefore been invalid, and he should not have been convicted as a relapsed heretic in his second trial, while the superstitious practices of which he was found guilty in 1472, including the invocation of demons to discover secret information, rendered him only suspect of heresy. He was thusly absolved of charges and allowed to return to all priestly duties/offices"[89]. To summarize, the ability to muster

[89] Tamar Herzig, "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1035. doi: 10.1086/664084.

political support and inflame tensions between Mendicant orders got Cacciaguerra out of any sort of legal repercussions for his heretical actions.

That being said, not everyone in fifteenth century Italy was so lucky. In 1498, a suspected necromancer was burned at the stake in Bologna, a lay woman named Gentile Cimitri.[90] Importantly, the Franciscan friars she worked with who allegedly taught her necromancy, on the other hand, were not punished. According to the account of her trial, "with the assistance of four Franciscans, and especially of a certain Fra Silvestro, Cimitri entered the cemetery of San Francesco at nighttime completely naked, in honor of the devil, and exhumed corpses, whose members were used to prepare magic potions."[91] Upon being caught, she refused to abjure her heresies and was relaxed to the secular arm. Unlike with the case of Cacciaguerra, Cimitri had no prior, vicar, or political backing to persuade the high ecclesiastics to intervene in her favor. Thus, Cimitri is another excellent example of lay persons/those without substantial political power or connections

While we have seen people (unlike Cimitri) being able to sway political power in their favor, the ability to do began to wane in the sixteenth century. For example, in 1508 an unnamed friar was found guilty of offering sacrifices to the devil, trampling the cross, and feeding consecrated hosts to a rooster. "Unlike his fifteenth-century predecessors, this friar paid with his life for his presumed offenses. Though the details of his trial are not known, it seems that by the time of his prosecution, priors were no longer willing to defend — as had happened with Cacciaguerra a few decades earlier — friars who practiced demonic rites."[92]

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[90] A discussion of the gendered aspect of this case is outside of the scope of this paper, but warrants future exploration. Cimitri's death sentence could be specifically related to *witchcraft* as opposed to necromancy and other forms of "higher" magic.

[91] Tamar Herzig, "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1048. doi: 10.1086/664084.

[92] Tamar Herzig, "The Demons and the Friars: Illicit Magic and Mendicant Rivalry in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1048. doi: 10.1086/664084.

All of these case studies highlight the specific points of my thesis. Specifically, accusations of clerical necromancy were often part of a "common toolbox of accusations" lodged against an opponent. In other words, they were often personally or politically motivated and did not stem from true concerns over clerics attempting necromancy. Moreover, if one was accused of necromancy, the punishment one received was positively correlated to the amount of political power one possessed or had access to.

Conclusion

This thesis has primarily concerned itself with discussing the "crossroad" or intersection of Christianity, law, and magical culture in order to get a better understanding of the legal repercussions for practicing the art of necromancy during the period of 1100-1500 CE, when higher learning emerged and sustained continuous development, and texts from the Arabic world became more widely available in Europe. It has suggested that one cannot understand the punishment of heresy and magic without looking at the hold of the Catholic Church over secular authorities or the power of politics in the implementation of punishments. In particular, it asserts that the relationship between punishments experienced by clerical necromancers were negatively correlated to their political power. Thus, if one had the power to avoid repercussions for dabbling in, or *being accused of* dabbling in, illicit forms of magic, one did. If not, one experienced repercussions. Particularly, if one had the *political* power or was connected to individuals with political power, consequences could be avoided.

This is a phenomenon starkly seen in the above case studies. The examples of clerical necromancy this study was able to find the most information on – those of the popes – had very little to do with actual concerns of popes practicing magic and more about political expedience. What is the best way to undermine an opponent? Make them the poster-child for something

everyone is afraid of. In this case, that would be the devil, and the mechanism by which these popes allegedly communicated with the devil was via use of magic and necromantic rituals. Based on the historical evidence, that's all these stories were –allegations. Necromancy appears to be part of a "common toolbox of accusations" that men threw at each other to try and undermine the other's authority and political power, particularly during times of papal crises. However, despite being accused of weighty crimes, no formal legal proceeding was officially opened against these popes (Boniface VIII is included here, as he was never officially taken to trial). Given the severity of these alleged transgressions, in both canon and secular law, it is not a stretch to say that a formal legal proceeding is the least that would have been done if these accusations were believed to be true.

Additionally, the information regarding each of the popes (and indeed the regular clergy) came not from any court case transcript but from literary accounts, some close to the events, some removed by decades or even centuries. This highlights the importance of works like Anselm of Besate's *Rhetorimachia*. Many of the stories of necromancy allegations could have been of a similar type; fanciful rhetorical exercises intended to scare an audience – clergymen and lay Christians alike – into following orthodox teachings. Interestingly, when the *Rhetorimachia* was written, contemporaries thought little of it, as it was known to be false. It was later chroniclers who interpreted it as true and used it as part of their repertoire against heresy. This calls into question not only the legitimacy of necromantic accusations (as well as their later interpretations) but also the efficacy of the "clerical underworld" in general.

In Kieckhefer's book, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, he mentions that necromancy was of particular interest to clerics, so much so that one could consider the circulation of necromantic handbooks among clerics a "clerical underworld." Going into this project with the concept of the

"clerical underworld" in mind, one would expect to find evidence (court cases, primary historical accounts, etc.) that necromancy was as widespread as the term suggests. However, the available number of case studies/examples of any true clerical necromancer was lacking. This speaks to the difficulty of approaching such a vague and subjective concept – magic – in a historical context, particularly with few primary sources available. Even so, the term "clerical underworld" implies a widespread network of necromancers that should be evident in historical accounts somewhere. But from present research, this network does not exist. Rather, clerical necromancy appears to have been less about policing heresy and more about enforcing Catholic codes of morality and extending the reach and power of both the Church and accusing individuals.

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